

1997 National Resources Inventory: *Oklahoma Farmland Conversion*

Background

The Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) is a statistically based survey that has been designed and implemented using scientific principles to assess conditions and trends of soil, water, and related resources on non-Federal lands in the United States-nearly 75 percent of the Nation's total land area. The NRI is conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with the Iowa State University Statistical Laboratory. The 1997 NRI captures data on land cover and use, soil erosion, prime farmland soils, wetlands, habitat diversity, selected conservation practices and related resource attributes at more than 800,000 scientifically selected sample sites. The 1997 NRI covers all 50 States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and some Pacific Basin locations.

Land Use

In 1997, total acreage in Oklahoma amounted to 44,738,100 acres, most of it rangeland (14,032,800), followed by cropland (9,735,700), pastureland (7,962,700), forestland (7,281,400), and developed land (about 1,926,300). Federal land totaled about 1,438,300 acres.

Land use is not static, however. It is surprisingly dynamic, with annual shifts in and out of different uses. In agriculture, there are constant shifts in the use of land among cropland, pasture, range and forested land to meet production needs, implement rotations of land in and out of cultivation, and maintain and sustain soil resources. Since 1982, cropland in Oklahoma, including land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), declined 1,832,600 acres. Pastureland increased 750,500 acres, and rangeland decreased 950,100 acres. Forestland increased by 473,800 acres. Urban land increased by 332,800.

Urbanization and Development

In the past, agricultural land conversion was thought of as happening only around major metropolitan areas, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, and the Eastern corridor from Washington, D.C. to New York. However, in Oklahoma, small and mid-sized cities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Lawton, and Ardmore, are experiencing rapid development and the consequent concerns associated with growing communities.

Developed land in Oklahoma totaled only about 4 percent of the non-Federal land area in 1997; however, from 1992-97 more land was developed (176,700 acres) than during 1982-92 (156,000 acres). The average annual rate of conversion was 15,600 acres per year from 1982-92. The average annual rate of conversion was 35,340 per year from 1992-97. Growth and prosperity in non-agricultural sectors of the economy have been dominant forces in the expansion of developed areas. Although not considered a threat to food production nationally, urbanization and development leads to the fragmentation of agricultural land and the loss of prime farmland. From 1992-97, the national and also the Oklahoma rate of development more than doubled.